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DeWild, Arlyn

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Narrator's name: Arlyn De Wild (and wife, Donna De Wild)

Length of interview: 57:37

Date of interview: 19 June 2012

Place of interview: Arlyn De Wild's home in Hull, Iowa

Interviewer's name: Sarah Bartz

For: Northwestern College, History 351: America and the Vietnam War

SB: Arlyn, thanks for doing this with me. Can you start by telling me where you grew up and what that was like for you?

AD: I was raised on a farm by rural Boyden, which is in Iowa here. That's where we grew up, on the farm - all my life I lived on a farm, before I went in the service, and my folks still lived there after I left, so we were just in a rural area by Hull, by Boyden.

SB: Did you have any family members in the service?

AD: My grandpa was in, my dad was in. My grandpa was in World War I, my dad was in World War II - you're talking immediate family? I had a brother that was in after I was. And I had brothers-in-law that were in, cousins. But for immediate family, my dad and grandpa both were in.

SB: And they were they Army?

AD: Yes.

SB: And were they drafted, or did they enlist?

AD: I think they were drafted. The war was going on and they were just, I don't know that my grandpa De Wild did, but my dad, he was Air Force, Air Corps—something. So he was in the Army but he worked on airplanes. He didn't actually see combat, but he was definitely... Somebody said that he was from Iowa and he was a farm boy, so they wanted him to work on things so they drafted him and put him on airplanes. And our whole life we lived around here, two different farm places by Boyden, but they were half a mile apart.

SB: So, did you feel like there was a sense of patriotism in your family, a sense of duty?

AD: Oh yes, like my wife too, she supports me one hundred percent and my mom, she really supported. There's definitely patriotism in the family, all the way from start to finish. My mom, too, she really didn't have a whole lot of her family in the service, but she was very, very patriotic. Memorial Days, the whole family was at

the service, out at the cemeteries, and... but mom, she's been gone since '94, so some of us, like Donna, carry on. She's an auxiliary member...

I remember, my dad was a Legion member, and one of the guys that was in the Legion,¹ he talked to me one time about becoming a Legion member. And I told him I didn't feel right doing that because I wasn't out of the service yet so I wasn't a vet. Somehow, at the next Legion meeting, something was said that, these young men anymore, they don't think they need the Legion. And my dad was very easygoing – he came home and he pretty upset because he thought so much of the Legion. Turned out it was me that had said it! So I explained to him that I had nothing against joining, but I figured you had to be out of the service before you could join. He was alright with that then, but he didn't say much very quickly. He was with them, we were all with them. And that's what the color guard, we're with that, the firers, whatever you want to call that, all the services we do. The twenty-one gun salute, and we do the cemetery, we do the funerals... My dad is still a Legion member, I am, my brother is, so yes, there is definitely patriotism in the family.

SB: So, when the Vietnam War broke out and guys started being sent over, what was the attitude in your family about that?

AD: First of all, I guessed I was going to get drafted. And, well, there were some people in the community that I really didn't appreciate going to be in the service with. So I was going to get drafted anyway, so what I did, I enlisted instead for three years. And they knew I had to go because I had my number, but then I had choice of where I wanted to go for basic and what my MOS² was going to be. They knew I was going to go; they weren't too happy that I went for three years and I went a little quicker than I had to. But no, they were supportive, and they knew it was going to happen. It just kind of hurt when I just did it so quick. And I was kind of a...In some ways, I would do the same thing over again, but some ways, if I knew more, I probably would have changed a couple things. But it wasn't in my hands, I knew that now. They were always supportive. We had lost a cousin's husband, he had died in Vietnam, and she spent the night one time with my folks one time because she needed support from the family too...But they knew it was going to happen, so they were supportive.

SB: So how old were you?

AD: When I went in, I was 19.

SB: And what year was this?

¹ The American Legion is the largest veteran service organization in the U.S.

² Military acronym for Military Occupational Specialty.

AD: '69. I went in June of '69. And I had enlisted three years instead of the two. And I was only in two and half years because that's when the war was winding down,³ and then some of us got sent home early. It didn't bother me any. [Laughs]

SB: So where did you go for basic?

AD: Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri. And everybody went for basic there. I mean, I had that or I could have gone to Fort Lewis Washington, I believe. And some of the guys from the area, I knew that's where they were going. I just thought Fort Leonard Wood sounded a lot better to me, so that's where I went for basic.

SB: So, tell me about basic. How was it for you?

AD: In basic, I gained 20 pounds. I had no problem whatsoever. My folks always taught me respect for your elders – that come about handy there. We had nice barracks – in fact, for a while there I was in charge of the rifles. The only thing is, one time they gave a command and I didn't hear them, so the next day I wasn't in charge of rifles no more. But I had nice barracks and I was in a room with just me and another guy, believe it or not, in basic, so that was nice. That was about the only time we had nice barracks [laughs], but that was nice...But no, basic, I didn't mind the food, the training didn't bother me a bit. You know, what I did, too – I was in shape before I went in, and running with the pack and the weight, no, I didn't mind basic whatsoever. The first week was bad. The first time you've been away from home except for visiting and staying by the cousins, so first week, it was bad, then I was just homesick. I guess not the first week, the first two or three days. After that...[inaudible].

SB: Did all the guys get along fairly well? Was there any racial tension?

AD: No, not then there wasn't. But everybody knew that they had to get along because of what was – most of them figured they were going to get sent across. No, at that time there wasn't no racial stuff. Later on there was. I can tell you when we get to that part [laughs].

Then I went to Texas for my training. See I didn't know any better, but they gave me three choices of what I wanted to be, and I couldn't remember the first two, but the third one I put down was a medic. Well, you know right off the bat what they took! And I didn't realize, you know, what medics were and where they ended up going, in the front lines. I say if I'd have known better, but that's where we were supposed to be. Found that out, now, that was the Lord's will. So I did that for 10 weeks in Fort Sam Houston, Texas. And I did three or four weeks of learning to drive in the hills. From there, that's when my...And it was nice there, too. Everybody told you what to do, and you had to practice on each other, but that wasn't the real thing yet.

³ In January 1973, President Nixon signed a peace agreement along with North and South Vietnam that would end direct US military involvement in the Vietnam War. However, the war continued until 1975 (History.com).

SB: So what kind of stuff did they have you doing in that medic training? Just like IVs, blood...?

AD: Basically, you did the first basics of people that were getting hurt, and you had to learn mostly first aid. How to stop the bleeding, you know, compression, just whatever you had to work with. But they didn't prepare you for people getting things blown off... from a distance, there's no problems, you know. But then when you get through, you think you're prepared, but you're not.

SB: So would you say you got out thinking you were prepared then?

AD: No. But I've always had it in the back of my mind, I'm not ever sure of myself. What do you call that, I don't have a lot of self-esteem that I can do it. When I take time to do it, I do it, but it's just... I wasn't real... Mentally, I wasn't prepared. I think I would have been alright, but you don't realize how much responsibility goes with it.

SB: So did any of the medical procedures bother you at that point?

AD: No.

SB: Do you think that's because of the farm background?

AD: No, no. I don't think so. You didn't see a lot of blood, or nothing like that. You had to learn how to give morphine shots, so you'd learn how to give shots. I think it was more or less, you learned – like if you were in the back, if you had to work in some station, just little things like that. One of the things you learned how to do was if somebody got a boil or something, you'd learn how to lance it, and just little things like that, but yeah, you don't learn the other stuff until you get in the real... Training-wise, I guess you prepared, but mentally no.

SB: Sure. So what happened after you were in Texas?

AD: After Texas? Well then, I don't remember if I got to come home or not, but then we got shipped right to Vietnam. So that was December 14, I think. That's when I ended up in Vietnam.

SB: Did you take a ship over?

AD: No, we flew. Yeah, that was a big ol' plane but it... It took a while, but it seemed like you were there before you wanted to be. You weren't really anticipating it, so then things go faster. No, we flew over in a big airplane.

SB: What was the atmosphere like in that plane?

AD: I don't remember, I think it was kind of quiet. Scared. The US got some, I guess, that were gung-ho for it, but if I remember correctly, it wasn't real lively. And the people knew they were going to get separated from who they trained with all their time...

SB: So what unit were you with?

AD: I'll have to – I've got that... [Gets up, leaves room] you know, that I told you, that one.

SB: Sure.

AD: [Returns with papers] You know, I'm not good at remembering things, but...

SB: Well, at least you got the documents for it, right?

AD: [Shuffling papers] And this is where I was real fortunate when I left, somebody had gotten newspapers for me with everything went on that night, but I was with Comanche Company 4th Battalion, 12th Infantry. That's who I was with. And over there, you'd go out as a company, which is three platoons, but when you get out there, you're divided into platoons. That's what we did there, too. And each platoon – I don't know just how many in a platoon,⁴ but – each has their own commanding officer, and each one has their own medic to take care of it, and stuff like that... Yeah, I got there. Looked pretty good because I saw that where they treated wounded in the back, I thought, well, if I can stay here, I'll be alright. [Laughs] They used to say, they informed you real quick. You're six months in the field and then the last six months you're in that station, you're routed around there someplace. Ok!

SB: So did you guys land in Saigon?⁵

AD: That I don't know. I don't remember. I knew I was going to – I laid that somewhere – a lot of memories came up, but them little details, I have no idea.

SB: Oh, that's fine. I know I couldn't remember that far removed.

AD: Some people – like, I got a thing from my cousin, Arthur – he was in Vietnam for 13 months – he just wrote a book after all these years, he's going to write a book about Vietnam. He has all those details down – I don't know how he does it. I can't do that, I never could.

SB: So, do just want to start talking about your experiences in Vietnam? As much as you're comfortable.

⁴ A U.S. Army platoon typically consists of between 16 and 40 soldiers.

⁵ Vietnam's largest city, known as Ho Chi Minh City since 1975 (Kislenko).

AD: I guess what I could do is, I had a letter I wrote, and I just read that over last night again. And that kind of gave me an idea of what my feelings were when I got there. Would you like to see that first?

SB: I would love to see that, yes! [Arlyn leaves, comes back]

AD: This is going to take a while, you probably want to shut that off! Or did you already. [Flipping through papers] Like this here I wrote to my – I got a lot more brothers and sisters than this, but this was who was at home yet.

SB: Sure. Do you want to read it out loud?

AD: Oh, ok! [Laughs] I won't do the first part of it, but...
[Reading from letter]

"I'll be back at the demilitarized zone, under different circumstances, Charlie Company's in for stand down now, where we just coming for a couple days to relax. Well, I filled out most of the tape" – but I couldn't think enough to fill out for the whole thing.⁶ "I don't think I told you this, but we found a different lieutenant than when we had the first time. I guess he is alright. I mentioned that on our first firefight, while I wasn't in it, I was pretty scared and I guess I didn't notice it, it wasn't my stomach or anything, but my legs were very shaky. I don't think I could have stood on them. I went to church yesterday for a memorial service for the ten guys that got killed with the explosions. I got so much mail, I wouldn't have the chance to answer right away." And my dad never really said much about some things, but I got so much... "The letter you wrote, dad said something about increased war activity since September. Over here I don't even realize how good or how bad it is because you don't hear what's going on. And we don't have newspapers in the field."

[Shuffling papers] Yeah, that's just the part that I just read about personal things at home...[Reading from letter] "The lieutenant in charge of us medics at headquarters command mentioned something to me this morning: they are about 10 medics or PFCs⁷ that came when" – they did it before I did, but I got to be PFC then too. "Some have been here at least six months. He said as far as promotions, I am fourth to get a promotion."

And you just haven't been there that long, but you write 160 days left in the field, about 317 days in the country left...I really just had to spend about 6 months. They said with the one that we were at, the 199th 4th, was about the safest place to be out in the field at that time. I was really happy and rejoiced in that.

You know, just little things like that, so you know I was very scared, but I do know that the first firefight – I don't remember a lot about it because they don't mention how it went, but I know that there was three that got killed right in front of

⁶ De Wild may be referencing an audio tape that recorded his voice. During the Vietnam War, some soldiers used audio tapes to send home to their families instead of writing letters because the letters would take up a lot of paper ("Vietnam-War Audio").

⁷ Military acronym for Private First Class (E-3).

us, and the lieutenant, he took me over there and he says, this is what your M16s⁸ do. And he showed me the bodies, and when shoot an M16, it comes up on you, and the bullet can just stagger, not straight, just one – you could just tell it was...I wasn't there long, so I don't know how much rejoicing, you know. They did want to get rid of the enemy, but...Yeah, that was the first time and I wasn't really involved with that one a whole lot. So I didn't have to treat nobody [laughs].

Then we went back for a couple days and then we had to go out, and then this time we were taken with a helicopter. And you'd get out in the field, you had to have the first ones get off first, and then they hit the ground running so they can make sure they clear the perimeter. So we got there, and I guess it was a couple days we were out in the jungles, and I don't know how long we were out there, not even a week, and then it happened. We were set up at night, and like I said, we were just a platoon, and when the Claymore,⁹ [inaudible] you probably know what that is...And they had them set up around the perimeter with trick wires. And that's the night that I got the first real combat that I was part of, and the last one [laughs]. But we were basically set up for the night, and I didn't know what to expect or [inaudible] because all of a sudden, the Claymores went off.

All of a sudden, everything broke loose, and I was given a choice if I wanted an M16, the rifle, or a pistol. Well, I never practiced with a pistol so I just had an M16 with me. And shortly after it happened – it started not even 20 minutes, half hour tops – that's where we were at, you know. And a lot had happened by that time, but of the 30 people, we had two get killed, and I think 22 injured. And one of the people that got killed died right next to me...[inaudible]...I think that's what that's where the enemy was. I'll be ok. And I heard noise first and then I looked up and there he was, so I had my M16 ready to shoot, and I heard a noise over here about the same distance away but I didn't see nothing, but I looked over there to see how many more were coming. Because I had been wounded already then. And then like I said, that guy got killed and I really couldn't move much because of my leg...but I heard them talking and as I was about to shoot, they disappeared. They pulled back that quick. So, I had visions of being captured because I couldn't move – I had visions of being killed first, but...Then what do you do? You feel guilty because it happened that way - that was my job, but everybody else had pulled back, and so here I was by myself because they didn't know who was wounded, but they had to get back to make them try the perimeter so they could continue fighting.

By that time, it was dark, of course, and what do I do? I know I can't go that way, and if I go back that way, would I be running into them, or am I going to be shot by our own people because they could smell me? When you have one, an injury like that, you don't use a tourniquet because that's a last resort. But I didn't have nothing else with me by that time, so I took my belt off and I wrapped it around my leg so it could stop the bleeding a little bit. So then I waited quite a while just to see if it was going to stop, and every time it got a little numb, then I loosened it up, but of course my leg was at a right angle – it wasn't straight behind me... After a while, then I started crawling real slow and then I heard them talking, and I knew it was

⁸ The standard U.S. military rifle used in Vietnam (Dennison).

⁹ A Claymore mine propelled steel balls out in a 60 degree radius up to 100 meters when detonated (Dennison and Perry).

our guys – it was English! So I say I wonder what I'd do, like to have to get their attention without getting shot! So only that came to mind was I went "psst!" And somebody did hear me.

And so then they helped me as much as they could, but in the meantime...a lot of fighting, but by that time it was over, by the time I got back to where everybody else was. And there was different ones hit, and they called for the medic to come, and I says, "I don't have my pack, I can try, but I can't move myself." The first thing you have, you feel this guilt feeling you know, it's just...But I don't know just how long we laid there, but they had other ones that were quite a ways out and they marched most – and I didn't understand everything that went on till I read this myself. Our radios were knocked out, so you can't have no contact until somebody went out and crawled and got a couple radios and they could put a couple together to make contact. But them guys, they must have marched most of the night to get to our position, because somebody else was under fire, too, from that.

Finally, then they did get helicopters in. I don't know if I was on the first helicopter or what, but I do know when they got me in the helicopter, I passed out from the pain. That was the first time that I had – yeah, when you have a broken leg and all of a sudden put all your weight on it [laughs]. But a lot of them got killed you know because of the other – but they were trained to do that. So I'm very fortunate. I never had to shoot nobody, but then again, I feel guilty for not doing my job...Yeah, you live with that...But I guess the part that really affects me the most...next time. [Blows nose.] When I was talking about how them guys all of a sudden disappeared, it was answer to prayer halfway across the world...

DD: His mom knew. She knew something was happening.

AD: And she started praying immediately. We put the times together later on, that was the exact same time when them people disappeared! And you just wonder why it happened to somebody else. You know, I was injured, but I can live with that. But why they were killed, and you weren't, you know. Yeah, I couldn't have done it over here, this bothers me enough...Sorry.

SB: No, it's ok.

AD: But no...the Lord had plans - it wasn't my time, you know. But you struggle to believe in prayer because my mom was always a prayerful person, more so than I ever would be. But she just knew right off the bat when we put them two together, the time zone difference and stuff like that, but it was the exact same time, that's when they disappeared. Didn't have to shoot nobody, didn't have to...So, yeah, you got good memories, but you got some that you just...

I guess I was in hospital, in traction, for – in that hospital, about 2 weeks, I guess. Then I got shipped out to a different hospital. But to this day, I've kept the bullet that I had, then the operator took it out. So about six months ago, she put kind of a wall together back here, and I put my Purple Heart¹⁰ there, but you think I could

¹⁰ U.S. military decoration awarded to any member of the Armed Forces wounded or killed while serving (Dennison).

find that bullet now – it's nowhere to be found. I figure if I am supposed to have it, that'll show up some time too, but that bullet hit me sideways, the point is good. But the bullet itself, the side of it is flattened out. Like I said, they operated and I got to keep it! [Blows nose.]

But my leg is – if I read the things, it's supposed to be about an inch and a half shorter, but I was taught it was about 2 inches shorter. So I wear a built-up shoe all the time, but compared to – you see some in the hospitals and you see them guys, they don't have no arms, they don't have no legs. They have nothing but a turn table that they lay on, just lay there. Later on, they turn the other way and then they're laying on their back. This is like a scratch, you know. But this is where it went in, and it went through my leg, and this is the gas cap, or that's where the operator took it out. Like I said, it's just one way if I stand, and it comes out like a muscle here. Yeah, that's where it went in, so the bone was shattered.

I layed in traction for about 2 weeks or better, and then they put a cast on, from here all the way up so you couldn't move at all. But that's how they did it back then. But I don't remember the 2 weeks in the hospital, but I had two operations there, and later on - another hospital - I had another operation. But I don't remember... We flew out – there was a big helicopter, it's all litters, all cost, no hang, so that trip went back because I didn't remember, I slept most of the time...

If you're not a believer before, you're a believer afterwards, you know. And to this day, you know, it's the Lord's will. And that's just the way it is. But how does he decide who dies and who doesn't? Next to you, he could have lived and I could've been just... I'm sure you hear that more often... Yeah, you see someone – I know that one guy, he was really bad, and he never complained a bit. Somebody else has a scratch, and they hollered to kingdom come [laughs]. Just a difference in people, mindset, I guess.

But I guess I was in the hospital about, [inaudible] months, for about don't know how long. But there again, coincidence. I'm coming from halfway across the world, and my folks are driving from Boyden to Denver. I'm in the hospital, in the...

DD: Corridor.

AD: Corridor, and they hadn't even found a room for me yet, and there my folks were. They asked where I was at. Over here, you know! So, coincidence, that would be planned that close together again... And it wasn't enough to get me out of the service, but I didn't have to do any standing, you know, whatever. But I'm glad I stayed in because I changed my MOS after that too [laughs].

To say that I'd do it over again – yeah, I would. Somethings maybe, but I'm glad all the experience I had, to go through it. Yep, if it wouldn't've been for this, I wouldn't've met my wife.

DD: Yep!

SB: How did you guys meet?

AD: Her sister worked with my mom in the office in Boyden. Well, when I came home injured, they had a get-together, some of the kids, and so she invited the gal she worked with, and she said why don't you just take your sister along. She really didn't want to go along because she didn't know nobody. She did go along - wasn't too impressed, I don't think, the first time, but later on when I came home again, then they had another get-together, and that was in the summertime. And she came along again and that summer we - first, we had a water fight that night, she had wet shorts on, she was just black! Then we were playing ball, so then she's trying to steal a base, and so I hit her on the head to get her out - knocked some sense into her. I asked her if she wanted to go out, and she says ok! But she didn't have a choice - everybody was standing around visiting, and nobody was paying no attention, so I asked her if she wanted to go out. Everybody was quiet just like that, so she didn't have no choice but to say yes! Well, she could have, but...I said, if I hadn't been injured, that's how we had to get put together, you know. [Inaudible] There's more details, I'm sure, but right now, that was the gist of it.

Like I said, we worked on a couple guys that had boils and stuff out in the field, and one guy had skin was real tender, you'd touch it and it wouldn't come back out. But other than that, just minor things. I was fortunate; I didn't have to work on nobody that had lost something, or nothing like that. To this day, I don't know if I could have done the job I was supposed to. But the Lord knew all that, and so this was how he planned to have me get so that my life could go forward, end my career in the service, doing something else instead. But the Lord says, I got to get your attention first, and this is how we have to do it, you know...

SB: Have you ever visited the memorial in D.C.?

DD: Yes.

AD: We did that about - we always wanted to, and what was it, two years ago?

DD: Oh, I think three, right?

AD: Three, whatever. I had a good, good Army buddy - Duane Morton - and he was never across, nothing like that, but when we moved to Denver, then he was in the mail service. And our whole outfit got shipped to California, and when I was out there, we got to be close, me and him, and his wife. What happened, I trained out west and I was a chaplain's assistant. I didn't preach, but I just had to drive the chaplain around and get the services ready, because we had three or four services every...

Well, I was out there then, and we got to know them real good then, so I [inaudible] asked if she wanted to fly to California to visit...She never thought her dad would say yes because her dad wasn't really impressed with us military people at the time - he changed. But she asked him anyway, and he said yeah, that was fine. So she came out to California, and she stayed with this Army buddy of mine and his wife. And basically we [inaudible] and stuff, but anyway, we was close - we still do things together. Like, we went to Washington, D.C. together; we saw all the

memorials, the new World War II and stuff. And every emotion you have, I had. I wouldn't have changed that either, I mean, that was just the best experience I could have had...It was very worthwhile going, and I guess just some of that stuff where – and I didn't have it like some of them because I talked to somebody from our church just a while back, and he said, "You know why they flew everybody home at night, when they was done at Vietnam? Because of the people – it was such a hated war¹¹ that they had to have them fly home at night so that they could process and so people didn't see them." But I never ever – of course, my circumstances were different, how I came back – but I never ever really experienced that at all.

I know one time I was flying, and I think I was still in the hospital yet, but the airplane I flew on was full in the regular class, but they had a place up in the first class, and they had to let people get on that flight, so since I was military, they let me come fly first class. This was night, it was kind of a long flight, but that stewardess was really wonderful. She sat and visited the whole time – she hardly had nothing to do. She was very supportive. And, you're glad to see things like that too...

I don't know if you want to hear more about this, but you asked later on if it was racial? It was winding down when I was in California, a lot of the people that had been in Vietnam, they didn't work well because they were told to start doing all them stupid things again like [inaudible], polish your boots, this and that. After what they'd been through, there's no way that they should have to do that anymore. So there was a lot of some of that stuff.

But people that were not in Vietnam, they were the ones causing problems afterwards. You could have TVs in your barracks after that, and one of my friends had a TV, and he was paying for it, so he should be able to watch what he wanted to. And I think at the time it was very racial, it wasn't just...But they had about three or four black guys come in there and tell him they wanted to watch a different channel, so he said no, it's mine, so they kicked that TV to pieces. So he reported it, and he had to get shipped out that night because his life was in danger.

This was in California, and they were trying to do things to kind of calm – so they had a rock concert in the fort one time, and I guess I don't care for that kind of music, so I didn't go, but I was the chaplain's assistant then, and we had a barracks that they went for our meetings and stuff, and they had game tables. And we could hear the music, you know, and the music was kind of winding down and all of a sudden I saw this white guy running for all he was worth. And right behind him there was about twelve, fifteen black guys, and they caught up with him, and right behind them was military police, but by the time they got there, basically, that white guy, he was dead. You could see everything from the barrack.

I thought, you just get out of Vietnam away from this kind of stuff, now you come back here and you're not any safer than you are in Vietnam. Where there you could have a gun or some weapon to protect, here you couldn't. Like I said, they took him

¹¹ Opposition to the Vietnam War started out small in 1964 but peaked in 1968 after the successful Tet Offensive by North Vietnam proved that the war's end was nowhere in sight (History.com).

later that night, heard later on that he was just... And after the concert, then they had a riot. They had some barracks that they tried to burn down.¹²

We went to see a movie one time, and one of my friends, he was a black guy. And there was about six of us, and we get jumped and, of course, the police were there pretty quick, but my friend got put in jail because he had a little bit of a pocketknife. The other kids, they had other weapons that were more dangerous, but they didn't get picked up, just the guy that we were with – he went right up in jail. So like I said, it definitely turned racial after that... So it was just about as bad to get out there as it was – it got better somewhat after that, but you didn't want to go by yourself no place, even on the fort, but that wasn't...

SB: And what fort was this?

AD: That was Fort Ord, California. That's real close by Carmel Beach and stuff like that.

But what really helped me is, for the front part, too, was while I was in the service and I became part of the Navigators, and that's how I got to be a chaplain's assistant too because of the Navigators. Yeah, we had services on Sunday of course, but then every – I forget what night of the week in the barracks that we had a meeting too. You went to the barracks and you invited everybody to come, and one time we had a group come in there, and we were out, going through the barracks to get people to come, and I have nothing against the Holy Spirit, you know, or talking in tongues. I'm sure it happens, but this particular group that we had, they got together in a circle, and they were praying, supposedly in tongues. I bet you we must have had about 15 people we had rounded up for this session. They came in that building and they heard the people praying like that, [laughs] you wouldn't have found them back – we had to cancel the meeting that night! And because of the service, this is where I got to be. This is all part of having you get to that point – we're getting off the Vietnam subject here a little bit, but I didn't mean to do that either. Sometimes you just kind of think of other little things, too, and you can go back and forth a little bit.

SB: Yeah, totally fine!

AD: But they always say in Vietnam – and you probably heard that too – you couldn't trust nobody. The person that cuts your hair during the day time, he'd be the one that would shoot you at night. Little kids you couldn't trust. But this one gal there, she kind of worked for some of the medics that were in the background. I forget how she said it, but she says too, God bless you, come back safe. And so there was definitely people out there that knew that we were there for the good of the country. But a lot of the things you just hear, I wasn't there to witness it... you know, they drop bombs [inaudible]. But I still remember that first time that night, and this was the first firefight that we had where they called in for these helicopters to come, and

¹² On June 27, 1971, Fort Ord hosted a rock concert by Canned Heat, but a fight broke out between a black GI and a white GI. The MPs (Military Police) tried to break up the fight but were attacked. Buildings were broken into and burned, a Greyhound bus was overturned, and fighting between soldiers and police spread throughout the base (Moser 76, "Riot Rocks").

at night they got these tracer bullets.¹³ And I forget how many helicopters there was, but you could just see one red or orange streak from the hilltop to the ground. So you know where I'm coming from, that's how fast it fired – just a streak, you know. And it wasn't every one that had that on them, but it was amazing just how they could...And when you hit someplace, you hit the ground running because there could be something wrong that you didn't know until you land. So the helicopter doesn't even touch the ground and they're jumping out. When you hit the ground, you hit the ground running – you don't just stand. You learn that real quick. Yeah, there's a lot of firepower out there, a lot of weapons...

SB: [Flipping pages] So, when the My Lai massacre¹⁴ came up, did that surprise you?

AD: The which one?

SB: The My Lai massacre, the Charlie company going into the village, I believe it was. There was a cover-up, and it came to light, and we were hearing about it –

AD: I guess that don't surprise me. You know, what them people been through. You got to put something to an end, and you just...No, you know. I guess the part that would surprise you is if it was political and they didn't let it happen. Like I said, I'm not real familiar with that, it's just something you just don't...But no, something like that, I guess I would have been supportive of them. But that bothers me is that kind of stuff, and I'm sure that's when they killed a bunch of people and stuff, and before that they had all that baby killers and stuff like that. You know, that didn't help because people that were in Vietnam, that's what they were called. And I'm sure that didn't help the situation. You know the ones that are making the most fuss? People that've never been there. Yeah, I can't say nothing against people that went to Canada to get out of the war – that's a right, that's a freedom if they want to do that. Yeah, something like that too, unless you've been there, don't judge them. And that's what people do way too much. They're out there free in the first place, but even today, there's things that go on that I don't like, and you know what I'm talking about. We all – my grandpa fought for that, my dad did, I did, my brother did – we all fight so these people in this country have that right to do what they want. And you don't appreciate it, but that's why we were out there, so they can do it. Good, bad, or indifferent, but don't condemn or judge somebody if you haven't been there...That's my story and I'm sticking to that!

And I can be judgmental, but something like that, you just go back and remember. And I guess too, you'll hear about these people that have all these flashbacks and stuff like that. Like my cousin when he visited me, and this was about last summer he came, and he was in Vietnam before I was, but he wanted to talk to relation about it. And he didn't have them flashbacks till way, way later in his life. And

¹³ A tracer bullet is built with a small pyrotechnic charge in its base that burns very brightly so the bullet's trajectory can be followed at night ("Tracer Ammunition").

¹⁴ A company of US soldiers brutally killed over 500 women, children, and old men in the village of My Lai in 1968. The US Army covered up the massacre for a year, fueling anti-war sentiment and dividing the United States over the Vietnam War (History.com).

people can talk about them, but until you experience it, you don't know. There's no way you can experience it.

So when he was talking about it, I've been very thankful. I've had it twice, and that's all I've ever had. Not to say it won't come some time, because in his life, he never had it until way later on. But I said to his wife too, I says, everybody can talk, you say I can about imagine, but you can't imagine. It is so real, and you can do everything to protect yourself, you don't who's around because you don't know who's around you – it's your loved ones but it's so real, you don't know that. Something like that messed up a lot of lives, but I don't know how like the World War I, World War II, what they went through. They didn't have all these people to help them get through it. Jim Vander Kooi, he couldn't talk about it until about 5 years ago, and he was World War II. Five years ago, he could start opening up. So yeah, you do have repercussions because of it. Like I said, I had that bad one night, and they were coming at me. But she woke me up. You know, you're awake but...It's real, it's just like you're...And you probably heard some of them, I'm sure, but when we was in Vietnam, they was saying get down to protect each other. But they think that they're fellow soldiers with you, so they're doing everything to keep you safe. And your family thinks you're hurting them, but they're protecting them, you know, and you don't know it.

SB: Donna, can I ask you then, what was it like for you when he was having the flashback? Did you know what was going on?

DD: Not till I woke him up more, and then he said the enemy was out to get him, and I looked at him and I said, "There are no enemy out there." We had trees out of our bedroom window, and I said, "It's just trees blowing in the wind, that's all there is." Then he calmed down.

AD: But I didn't see trees; I saw jungle.

DD: Yeah, I know. But he saw something, but I tried to straighten him out that he was ok, we were. I said he wasn't there anymore; he was in the United States, we're in Iowa...It took a little while, but then he calmed down.

AD: What I was feeling was just a relief, that I wasn't there.

DD: When you have that, I could tell suddenly it did make sense to him, but it took a while to calm him down. First I was sleeping, so I had to wake up a little bit to figure out what was going on...

AD: That was the worst one. Later on I had another one, but I'm just thankful I had them, so I know what people, when they're talking about it, I can say I know what you're talking about. And then you can tell people, hey, don't ever...it's real for them. You see too, people say, I know what you're going through and they never even had it – you don't know what he's going through...

SB: So have you talked about any of this to anyone else before? No?

AD: I started.

DD: He's tried. But yeah, he doesn't...

AD: That's why I struggle doing this with you, but I thought, well, it has to be known, and I'm just thankful you're doing it.

DD: Have you had family members in the service?

SB: I have an uncle in the service.

DD: Ok. I didn't know if your parents or immediate family – ok.

SB: I've always had an interest in the military, and kind of through college realized military history is the route I want to go eventually, so that's kind of the jumpstart for this.

AD: And after you've been in the military, you do things there you wouldn't do any other place. Like in our church, we have a choir, and I've never sung in a choir in a church – well, when I was little – but a couple years ago our Legion, we was at a Memorial Day service, we always had special music, we thought, well why don't we get the people in the service and have them have a choir and sing all the different medleys of the different service people. We sang that, we started out singing *Battle Hymn of the Republic*, and now we just sing the one, but people that have never – Arlyn Bonestroo – would never sing in church, but were in that choir [laughs].

But no, because of them experiences, you do things now because you feel that's why I'm still alive because he wants me to do that. And I've put myself in a lot of positions where I'm very, very uncomfortable. You know, you pray about it, and then most of the time it was like teaching in a church and stuff like that and different things, being on consistory. And you really don't think you should do it, but well, I have to because you feel guilty because you're still here, so this is what he wanted me to do. And there's different things where, whenever the opportunity comes up, for church, [inaudible] sometime, it's not easy for her. I think the last one was with the Gideons¹⁵ – they ask you to be there, well that must be what I'm supposed to do because the Lord spared me, you know. It's more sometimes a guilt thing, so you do it, instead of...I was supposed to just do it, I guess, because he always got me through it, but all your life, you just kind of live with that, just a reminder...That's just me [laughs], you know.

I'm sure you talked to a lot more people that had a lot more experiences out there than what...

¹⁵ Gideons International is an evangelical Christian association that distributes free copies of the Bible.

SB: There's been such a range of experiences. Each one is different, and each one is very important.

AD: Yeah, exactly...But no, to say I've tried, but just...They say if you do it once, you get through it, and you won't bother it the second time, but that'll never happen. It'll bother just as much the next time. But I'm just thankful that people like you are willing to put this forth...

SB: I'm a firm believer that you can't know what really happened unless you talk to people that experienced it.

AD: Getting it, not second-hand, you need first-hand.

SB: Exactly.

AD: And I think the hard part is, you start getting – things have been buried for years start to come out again...Just little things. Last night, too, I was just laying there – it's amazing the things that I forgot about till – that's why I could tell you some of it now, you know. It'd been buried back there for a long time...

SB: Well, thank you.

AD: Thank you, I just don't know what else...Thank you.

SB: No, it's fine, you've got lots of really interesting and valuable information, so yeah.

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